Common Ground

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/57063157.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Categories:
F/M, Gen, M/M

Fandom:
The Bikeriders (2023)

Relationships:
Kathy & Johnny (The Bikeriders), Benny/Johnny (The Bikeriders), Benny/Kathy (The Bikeriders)

Characters:
Johnny (The Bikeriders), Kathy (The Bikeriders)

Additional Tags:
Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Missing Scene, Complicated Relationships

Language:
English

Stats:
Published: 2024-07-02 Words: 2,915 Chapters: 1/1

Common Ground

by All_InProcess

Summary

“You were right.”

That statement got her to stop mid-ramble. She never thought that she would hear those three words from Johnny. Definitely never thought she would hear him saying them to her with any kind of sincerity. Her leg bounced as she fought the urge to pepper him with questions about what he meant by that. He’d get there. All these boys—they’d get to the point even if it took them ten years to get there.

--

Johnny goes to the only other person who might have a shot at understanding what he's feeling.

Notes

i wish we could've gotten five million scenes of these two.

Johnny knew that he wasn't the person that Kathy wanted to see. He never was, really, right from the start. Back then he could at least say that it wasn't fair. That wasn't the case anymore. By now he wouldn't be surprised if she had a running list of things he'd done, things he'd caused. He wouldn't blame her for it.

Still, he found himself parking right in front of her house. He didn't get out of his car right away, instead opting to sit, let the engine idle as he looked around. Even back when Benny had been around, he didn't spend time here like the other guys did. Kathy was probably thankful for that even though she never said as much. He'd pass by sometimes though—he'd see the bikes out front, the beer bottles and cigarette butts. He'd see the guys lounging on the steps and occasionally he'd hear them inside even if he never crossed the threshold. There was none of that now. Partly because it was the middle of the night, and partly because Benny had been gone for months so there was no overarching excuse to be there anymore. He wondered if Kathy missed the chaos or was enjoying the return of the silence. He wondered if the guys missed it. He'd never ask.

Finally cutting the engine, the street went quiet. His headlights turned off and the weak light from the scattered lampposts barely gave him enough to see. Stuffing his hands in the pockets of his jacket, he slowly made his way up the front steps of Kathy's house. There was a tiny bit of light coming through the window on the first floor, but the fact that the rest of the windows were dark had him thinking that she wasn't exactly up. He should just get right back in his car and carry on home. No harm, no foul. She wouldn't even know that he had stopped by.

Instead, he crossed her tiny front porch in two long strides and landed himself right in front of her door. He stared at the doorknob for a moment, hands still balled into fists inside his coat pockets. It was his last chance to turn around and pretend that he hadn't ever tried to come around in the first place. Maybe when he thought back on it later, he would try to convince himself that he really did try to force himself to leave.

He knocked on the door twice, then three times. Not so hard that he would wake the neighborhood, but hopefully with enough force that it would reach upstairs. Leaning forward, he let his head come to rest on the doorframe while he waited. His eyes shut as he listened for any hint of sound coming from inside. Each second that passed, the frown on his face grew a little deeper. Waiting was just as futile as the rest of

it.

It wasn't until he felt movement on the other side of the door that he realized his hand was on the doorknob. He wasn't going to try and force his way inside—he didn't know what his plan was going to be. But once he felt the jiggling of the handle he immediately let go and took a small step back. She wasn't going to be happy no matter what, but she definitely wasn't going to be happy if he toppled his way inside once she pulled the door open.

Kathy looked at him through the sliver of space she'd created in the doorway. He could hardly see half of her but she could still see all of him. He looked exhausted—she was sure that they both did at this point. He looked smaller than she remembered him being, though. Shoulders hunched, hands stuffed in his pockets. The man she met at the bar those years ago was long gone now—he and Benny had that in common still at least.

"Johnny?" she hadn't meant to say his name like an ask, but it was the only way to convey her surprise and confusion when her brain was still fuzzy with sleep.

There was a slight, momentary twitch of his lips. On a better day it would've been the perfunctory smile he gave her whenever she came around with Benny. He was too tired for that now, though. "Hey, Kathy."

Her eyes narrowed for a moment, still not opening the door up any wider. "Everythin'…everythin' alright?" The answer felt obvious but she wanted to get some sort of idea of what she was in for.

He shrugged and nodded despite all the evidence to the contrary. "Yeah, I'd say so."

"Yeah?" She finally opened the door enough so that she could stand completely in the gap of it. "Then what're you doin' on my lawn at two in the morning?"

He gnawed on the answer to that question for a moment. The truth was, he didn't exactly know what he was doing there. He wasn't totally sure why he had decided that it was finally time to show up and see her. Their last conversation hadn't been an amicable one. It wasn't often that any of their conversations were, even before Benny left. She wasn't exactly the type to coddle him, but he didn't think that he was showing up for that. He wasn't there looking for a fight either. Her question should've been a simple one but he had no good

response for it.

“I don’t know,” he finally said. He took another step backwards. “I’ll see ya, Kathy.”

“Wait.” She pulled the door open all the way. If it hadn’t been so cold, and if she had been wearing more than just her pajamas, she would’ve gone out onto the porch after him. Luckily it didn’t come to that. “Just,” she huffed and stepped to the side, motioning for him to come through the door, “c’mon. Before the neighbors wake up and start staring.”

Johnny did as she asked, his lack of hesitation letting her know that he hadn’t really wanted to leave even if he couldn’t spit out why it was that he had shown up in the first place. He walked past Kathy and into the tiny living room, not going any further when she wasn’t the one leading the way. He turned around and watched her as she shut and locked the door. She peeked back out through the curtain one more time, and Johnny wondered what exactly she thought her neighbors were going to do or say about any of it.

Apparently satisfied that there were no prying eyes out on the street in the small hours of the morning, Kathy turned back around so that she was facing Johnny. Her living room had been the go-to spot for so many men in the club over the years, men that had no problem making themselves perfectly at home. And, despite what she said sometimes, she didn’t really mind it all that much most days. No one would have guessed any of that, though, judging by the way that Johnny was standing there like a man who had never seen the inside of a house before.

“Want a smoke?” Kathy offered, figuring that was a much easier question for him to answer. He gave a tight nod and she gestured for him to follow her. “Alright then.”

They were sitting across from each other at Kathy’s tiny kitchen table. Two in the morning felt like it called for something stronger than beer, so in the middle of the table between them was an ash tray and a bottle of whiskey that Kathy hardly ever poured from. They were both just nursing their first drink, the clink of the glasses against the tabletop the only thing cutting through the silence.

Letting out a deep sigh that caused a billow of smoke to slip past her lips, Kathy leaned back in her chair. She had one arm crossed over her chest, the other bent so that her cigarette was perched between her

fingers right by her mouth.

“You gonna make me ask you again?”

Johnny’s eyes were zeroed in on the table. He shook his head as he took a drag off the cigarette she’d given him. Kathy tilted her head, studying him as he studied the table. She wondered what the universe had been thinking when it decided to throw the two of them into the same orbit. The three of them, really. She had a feeling that’s what this was about.

“I haven’t heard from him,” she said before tapping the ash off the end of her cigarette, “if that’s what you came here to ask.”

He shook his head, finally looking her in the eye. “That’s not what I came here to ask.”

She shrugged. “Alright. What’d you come here to ask, then? I’m not a mind reader, you know. You gotta tell me. I’m tellin’ you, all you boys think we can just—”

“You were right.”

That statement got her to stop mid-ramble. She never thought that she would hear those three words from Johnny. Definitely never thought she would hear him saying them to her with any kind of sincerity. Her leg bounced as she fought the urge to pepper him with questions about what he meant by that. He’d get there. All these boys—they’d get to the point even if it took them ten years to get there.

“I don’t think that he ever would’a turned in his colors,” Johnny said with a shake of his head. “But I…I did this.”

“Did what?”

“He left ‘cause I—”

“No,” she cut him off. She made a small sweeping gesture with her hand, leaving a tendril of smoke in her wake as she did. “You didn’t make him leave. You, you said it, you know?” She shook her head. “No one makes Benny do anything that Benny doesn’t wanna do.”

He couldn’t hold her gaze anymore. “I don’t know.”

“I tried to get him to leave, you know.”

He nodded. “I know.”

“No. I mean,” she took an unsteady breath, “after…all’a that happened. I told him I couldn’t live like this no more, you know? Told him we needed to get out.” Her leg bounced a little faster. “Know what he told me?” She waited for Johnny to look at her again. “He told me not to make him choose.”

“Kid never did good with feeling backed into a corner.”

“You don’t get it.” She took the final drag that she could off the cigarette in her hand before stubbing it out in the ashtray a little more aggressively than necessary. “That *was* him choosin’, you know?”

Johnny’s face was riddled with confusion along with the exhaustion. “Choosin’ what?”

“You,” she said, wanting it to sound bitter but it didn’t. “The club.” She scoffed and crossed her arms over her chest. “Not me.”

“You think that’s what it was?” Johnny asked. His tone was neutral enough but there was a look in his eyes that conveyed the layers of depth to his question.

It was difficult to sit across the table from her and think that Benny hadn’t chosen her. Johnny was sure that that was how she saw it. Kathy might not have liked him but she hadn’t made a very large habit of lying to him, either. But it was difficult to believe that Benny hadn’t chosen her when he *had*. Over and over again. He chose her when he sat outside her house all night. He chose her when he dumped what little money he had into a wedding band after five weeks of knowing her. He chose her again and again every night that he went home to her.

Even in the moments when Johnny felt like Benny was choosing him, he had never been quite sure. He wasn’t sure if it was about him, or if it was about the club. And it wasn’t as though Benny was going to sit there and wax poetic about it with him and detail out all the intricacies of it. Johnny would either get it or he wouldn’t. And Johnny was fairly certain he never really did understand where Benny’s head was at, at any given time. His fingers were either tangled with Kathy’s, wrapped around a cigarette, or gripping the throttle on his bike. His eyes were everywhere, all the time. But his head? His heart? Johnny could never figure those things out. Kathy had—must’ve, if she had Benny always coming back to her. Kathy had Benny on the other side of her bed while Johnny was just hoping that they’d be in the same bar. It didn’t seem fair. He chose her.

“You think it was somethin’ else?” she asked, pulling him from his spiraling thoughts.

He wanted to say everything that he had been thinking but he couldn’t force himself to do it. Sitting down with Kathy reminded Johnny, in a way that was impossible to ignore, that while he might’ve been more of a talker than Benny had been, that was a very low bar to meet. It was easy to seem chatty when Benny was the person on the other end of the conversation. Kathy, though? Kathy was leagues ahead of him—Johnny was just trying to figure out how to keep up.

“He married you,” Johnny said, like it was the ultimate end to the argument.

Her face scrunched for a moment and she shrugged. “And?” She took a sip from her glass. “He still left me. No goodbye. No nothin’.” The laugh she let out was somewhere between cold and sad. “Bet he’s not wearin’ a wedding ring no more but he’s *still* got them colors on.”

“That’s different.”

She raised her eyebrows. “Is it?” There were a few beats of silence before she asked, “This what you came here for, Johnny?”

He shrugged. “Told ya—I don’t know what I came here for.”

“I thought about comin’ by a couple times, you know.” She nodded in the direction of her front door. “To the bar. Thought about comin’ by and asking you if you’d heard from him, if you knew where he was. But then I figured,” she shrugged, “what good would it have done? So what if you knew?”

“You miss him?” Johnny asked.

She nodded without hesitation. “’Course I do.” She waited, watching him finish off what was left in his glass. “Do you?”

He thought about it for a moment, staring at where his whiskey used to be. Finally, he nodded. “Yeah. I do. I think that’s why I showed up.”

Despite the weight of their conversation, Kathy let out a hum of amusement. “Wanted to come talk to the other wife who got left behind?” She leaned forward, propping her elbows on the table. “Real nice.”

He shook his head, the only clue to his amusement was the fact that he wasn't getting angry.

"If it makes you feel any better, some days I still get real mad at you about it." She sighed. "But it wasn't you. Wish it was, but it wasn't. Benny, you know, he, he always," she reached and took another cigarette from the pack, sparking it before continuing, "he was always talkin' about leaving. Every time something happened, he said he would. You know, like that would solve it."

"Yeah?"

She nodded as she took a drag. "Yeah. I don't think you did anythin'. I think he finally, just, you know…finally did it."

"Hmph," he grunted softly, knowing that he should be saying *something* in response to that but not quite sure what.

"If we're talkin' about choices, Johnny," she said as she sighed, giving a slow, sad shake of her head, "I don't think he really ended up choosin' either of us."

"I guess not."

"You wish that felt better, huh?" He didn't say anything in response but he didn't have to. Kathy said all the time how she wasn't a mind reader but after so many years around Benny, she liked to think that she was something close. "He never called the bar?"

Johnny shook his head. "Three months. Nothin'."

"If you knew where he was, would you go after him?" she asked.

If it had been three months earlier, the question would've felt like bait. But now, in the middle of the night in an empty house and a quiet kitchen, Johnny could feel that it wasn't a trap. It was genuine. She just wanted to know.

"Prob'ly."

Kathy silently chastised herself as she smiled at that. She knew that she shouldn't, but where was the harm in it now? She'd meant it, saying that Benny hadn't chosen either of them. For so many years her life felt like a tug-of-war game of her against Johnny. And for what? They were both alone now.

“Why now?” she asked.

“What?”

Her gaze was more focused on the cigarette in her hand than it was on Johnny. “Coulda’ come over and had this conversation any time. Didn’t have to be at two in the morning, waking me up, you know.” She looked at him again. “Why now?”

“Couldn’t sleep,” he said simply. After another beat. “Got thinkin’ and just…” He trailed off for a moment as he tried to figure out where his sentence was going. “You’d get it.”

Kathy’s sigh gave way to a weary smile. “Yeah. I get it.”

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!